Traditionally, meat has been considered a macho food and meat eating a male activity. Men are strong, men need to be strong therefore men need meat—so runs the myth reinforced by images of meat-eating football players, wrestlers and boxers. One nutritionist offered the theory that the more men sit at their desks all day, the more they want to be reassured about their maleness in eating those large slabs of bleeding meat which are the last symbol of machismo.

Medical evidence, though, suggests that far from being macho, meat actually prevents men from being men where it really counts.

Meat impedes sexual performance. Here's why vegetarians make better lovers:

1.

To begin with meat-eating can actually lead to impotence. The functioning of all bodily organs depends on blood supply. So just as the heart stops functioning when the arteries leading to it get blocked,

and choking off blood to the brain causes a stroke, similarly when arteries to the genitals are clogged, that part of the body will not perform properly either. When the arteries are impeded only slightly, it takes longer for the organ to function. As the obstruction worsens, complete impotence occurs. In America, where the diet is primarily meat-based this affects one in four over 60-year-old men— a whopping 25%. Meat-eating is a major cause of arterial blockage. By age 23, three out of four men have at least one major blockage in the arteries to the heart. Switching from red meat to chicken and fish does not help much, if at all. Both have plenty of cholesterol and a lot more fat than you would guess. Blockages occur in all the major arteries, not just those leading to the heart. For instance, by age 20, 10 percent of men have an advanced blockage in at least one of the arteries that nourish the spine. Researchers now theorize that this loss of blood flow to the spine is a major contributor to the deterioration of the disks and vertebrae that lead to back pain.

2.

Since meat is the main culprit, a simple change of diet and lifestyle can actually prevent and even reverse arterial clogging. Breakthrough research by Dean Ornish, M.D., at the University of California-San Francisco showed that a combination of a low-fat vegetarian diet, moderate exercise, stress management, and no smoking resulted in the arteries actually cleaning out

themselves.

3.

Apart from unclogging the arteries, being vegetarian boosts virility by reducing or eliminating many of the other factors contributing to impotence, including diabetes, obesity, and hypertension. Another root-cause of impotence comes from the side-effects of various medications. In fact, two of the worst culprits are blood pressure pills and cholesterol-lowering drugs, both prescribed for conditions that could be dramatically improved by a vegetarian diet. Low-fat vegetarian diets help prevent heart disease, colon cancer, obesity, stroke, kidney disease, hypertension, obesity, and gallstones. With the right food and exercise, many men can cut back on, and even discontinue, drug therapy. Certainly men would be better off making dietary and lifestyle changes than popping pills.

4.

Turning vegetarian can also prevent prostate problems; a major worry for older men. A meat-based diet causes a man's body to make a bit too much testosterone. This doesn't make you more mainly but actually causes overproduction of cells in the prostate gland, which rests beneath the bladder and surrounds the urethra. An overgrown prostate can pinch off urinary flow, leading to a diagnosis of benign prostate hyperplasia. This condition can make you miserable, necessitating trips to the bathroom all night long. This process happens to some extent in most men, starting at about age 30, but it is two-thirds less likely to occur at all if you are a vegetarian. Indeed, the right diet can reduce the hormonal stimulation of the prostate and prevent both prostate enlargement and prostate cancer.

5.

Apart from sexually able, a vegetarian diet helps keep you more sexually attractive. The average man who starts a vegetarian diet becomes 10 percent leaner. In the Dean Ornish research mentioned previously, the average person lost 22 pounds, and some lost much more. Part of the reason men lose weight on a veg diet is that vegetables, grains, fruits, beans and most other plant foods are naturally low in calories unless fat is added during cooking. But these foods also readjust your body chemistry. The natural starches in pasta, potatoes, rice and beans lead to the activation of two natural hormones in your body, noradrenaline and thyroid hormone, which in turn step up your calorie-burning metabolism.

6.

You might even forestall baldness. Whether or not a man goes bald depends entirely on genetics. However, the age at which hair loss starts and how quickly it progresses depends on testosterone, which enters the hair follicles and gradually kills them off. Some research

suggests that the same excess testosterone that enlarges a meat eater's prostate might cause baldness to occur too soon and too quickly. Research in this area is still new, but Japanese dermatologists have observed that as the Japanese diet has become Westernized -- other words, more laden with meat and fat -- baldness has become more common, especially in younger men. The reason, they believe, is not only a stronger testosterone attack on the hair follicles but also more rapid conversion of testosterone within the follicle to a much more powerful hormone, called DHT, which is basically follicle poison. A low-fat vegetarian diet will not let you keep your hair forever but may enable you to keep more of it for longer than you would otherwise.

7.

Going veggie also brings you closer to the newage complete man ideal—the man who changes nappies and tyres with equal ease. The Massachusetts Male Aging Study, a large research study of health in older men conducted by the Boston University's school of Medicine, found that the more fibre in a man's diet, the less likely he is to be overly aggressive and domineering. The reason, presumably, is that fibre helps prevent testosterone excesses. The liver constantly filters the blood, pulling out waste testosterone and sending it into the intestinal tract. There, fibre soaks up the testosterone like a sponge and carries it out with other waste products.

Animal foods don't contain any fibre at all. The more fish, chicken, beef, eggs or cheese on your plate, the fewer plant foods you eat; the result is you have less fibre in your digestive tract and you end up reabsorbing your own waste testosterone.

So why resort to artificial aids like Viagra to cure impotence when turning vegetarian will prevent the problem in the first place. There are those that will want to have their cake or in this case meat and eat it too which means carrying on with meat and simply popping the little blue pills as and when needed. Except that there are several disadvantages to this formula. First, Viagra does not work for everyone. Between 20 percent and 40 percent of men get no result at all. Second, while it may cause a temporary surge of virility, it cannot solve the problems that so often cause impotence, such as blocked arteries, obesity and high blood pressure so while it might enable a man to perform, it will also heighten the risk of heart collapse from the extra exertion. Third, Viagra comes with annoying side-effects like blinding headaches and upset stomachs.

Apart from side effects, there is also the danger that there might be as yet undiscovered long term damage from this relatively new drug. Just how imperfect drug research is can be gauged

from the fact that a 1990 review of 209 new prescription drugs marketed in a previous 10-year period, revealed that more than half had to be relabeled or withdrawn because of adverse reactions that could lead to hospitalization, disability, or death. Viagra has not been around for long so why take a chance. Finally while Viagra is expensive, often hard to get, and only temporary in its effect, veggies are cheap, plentiful and long lastingly effective.

So there it is, Gentlemen, the most effective sexual aid is not a little blue pill but those greens on the grocery shelf. So the day may not be far when it is unanimously declared that real men eat ‘ghaasphoos’.

Maneka Gandhi